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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LILONGWE 000358

SIPDIS

LONDON FOR AF WATCHER PETER LORD

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TAGS: KDEM PGOV MI

SUBJECT: ELECTION DEFEATS FRACTURE THE MALAWI CONGRESS PARTY

Classified By: POLITICAL OFFICER JOHN LETVIN FOR REASONS 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The poor performance of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) in the recent general elections led Ishmael Chafukira, the party's spokesman, to call for the immediate resignation of the party's leader and presidential candidate, John Tembo. In return, Tembo fired Chafukira and has branded him as a traitor to the party. This has led to a split in the party between those who support Tembo and those who would like to see change occur within the MCP. Chafukira, who claims that he has significant support from losing MCP parliamentary candidates and party financiers, believes the MCP must immediately reform itself to become more open and constituent-focused. Chafukira has bet his career in the MCP that he can bring reform to the party, but Tembo still singularly controls the MCP. Ultimately, Chafukira and other MCP reformers may find more success creating a new organization and bringing like-minded reformers into their fold. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) In Malawi's recent general elections, the Malawi Congress Party lost over half of its seats in the Parliament, and MCP presidential candidate John Tembo lost by a margin of over 30 percent. Following the defeat, Tembo told his party that he had formally challenged the results and would not accept defeat until his concerns were addressed. The overwhelming defeat and Tembo's refusal to accept the results prompted Ishmael Chafukira, the MCP's spokesman, to openly criticize the leadership of Tembo and ask him to resign as the party's president. Tembo responded by firing Chafukira and saying his statements were tantamount to resignation from the MCP. Chafukira, who won reelection to his own parliamentary seat, maintains he is still a staunch member of the MCP and has only the party's interests at heart.

¶3. (C) Chafukira told emboffs that despite being the lone public voice to call for Tembo's resignation, he has significant support within the MCP. Chafukira acknowledged that the 25 other MCP members of Parliament will likely stand behind Tembo, but said former party leaders, losing MCP candidates, and MCP financiers have all silently backed his position. Chafukira said he has been approached about starting a new party, but he views this as a move of last resort. Likewise, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) spokesman Heatherwick Ntaba made intonations that the DPP might use its majority to amend the Parliament's standing orders to name Chafukira the Leader of the Opposition instead of Tembo. Chafukira dismissed the DPP's interference and said the reports only undermined his position as a reformer within the MCP. Instead, Chafukira said he plans to continue to gather support within the party and try to force a new convention to decide on the party's leadership.

¶4. (C) The MCP had maintained a strong support base in the Central Region of Malawi before the 2009 elections based on the influence of former dictator Kamuzu Banda. Chafukira said that the MCP under Tembo's leadership took this support for

granted and failed to reach out to the new generation of voters who didn't remember the MCP's glory days under Banda. He faulted Tembo for resting on his reputation and not campaigning on issues. Chafukira lamented that the 2009 elections signaled the end of the era of "big man" politics in Malawi, but said Tembo refuses to acknowledge the fact. He insists that the MCP must immediately open up, promote internal debate, and listen to the needs of the people if it wants to survive until the next election as a party.

¶5. (C) Chafukira told emboffs that campaign financing was the final straw in his decision to go public against Tembo. He said the MCP devoted all of its party resources to Tembo's presidential campaign, leaving no money for MCP parliamentary candidates, many of whom could not even afford campaign posters. When Tembo announced he would challenge the election results, he told Chafukira and MCP leadership that he planned to use over \$70,000 USD of the party's money for legal fees. Chafukira said he protested and asked Tembo to contest the election results as an individual with his own money and not waste party resources on the frivolous challenge. After Tembo refused, Chafukira went to the media to call for Tembo's resignation and to ask him to account for the MCP's funds. Chafukira said numerous losing MCP candidates and party financiers have since agreed to support his effort to remove Tembo because of suspected abuse of finances.

¶6. (C) Comment: Tembo's defeat and former president Muluzi's "retirement" from politics have caused many in the next generation of Malawian politicians to believe it is now their time. While Chafukira is the first in the MCP's next

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generation to challenge the old guard, similar movements struck Muluzi's United Democratic Front over the past two years. Many think Chafukira's move to unseat Tembo was premature, but coming on the heels of Tembo's crushing defeat, he acted boldly when dissatisfaction with Tembo was at its highest. Despite the momentary dissatisfaction with his leadership, Tembo is still very much in control of the MCP and will likely expel Chafukira and other reformers from the MCP.

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